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ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT *

ISABEL HAMPTON ROBB

ONLY once during the twelve months is it our privilege to meet together as a corporate body to deal with the common affairs of our common work, to take counsel, as wisely as we may, how we may improve and further that work by mutual and organized efforts, and at the same time strengthen those ties which bind us together as individual workers and as members of a profession which in a little over twenty-five years has grown, as it were, from a small seed to a mighty tree whose branches spread widely and in many directions. To this yearly gathering also are brought the suggestions of individual members and of individual *alumnæ* associations to receive the consideration and attention of the representatives of the whole body, who deliberate upon them and take such action as seems best. The result of these deliberations, together with the substance of the papers read and of the ensuing discussions, are reported to the several *alumnæ* by their delegates, and, moreover, are printed in detail in the annual report, which is circulated through the proper channels, so that it comes within the reach of even the most remote member, supplying her, we trust, with fresh food for thought and a new stimulus for the work of the next year.

It would seem, therefore, advisable that we should make use of this annual opportunity to hold a general review of our forces, so that, utilizing what we can learn from the retrospect, we may be the better able to

* Before the Third Annual Convention of the Associated *Alumnæ* of Trained Nurses of the United States. Held in New York, May 3, 4, and 5, 1900.

deal with the present and receive a clearer understanding as regards the future. Our looking backward does not as yet give us much ground to cover, since this is only the third time we have met together, and our combined deliberations cover only two years of work. But even in this short time we have been brought face to face with circumstances which are of deep import to all nurses, and which have caused the need for concentrated interest and work to be keenly felt. To those of our members to whom the benefits to be derived from organization were perhaps not yet clear, I feel sure that certain events of the past two years have shown the imperative need for organization, so that I trust that this question may be regarded as permanently settled. Indeed, to our cost we now know that the concentration of our forces came too late by at least a year, for one can hardly doubt that the nursing of our soldiers during the Spanish-American war would naturally have fallen into our hands had our professional organization been completed earlier. If this had been done, our capacity to meet properly so important a crisis would have been better understood and appreciated, with the result that not only would our soldiers have received better nursing, but we ourselves might have been spared the extra exertion that has been demanded of us during the past two years in our continued efforts in supporting the Army Nursing Bill, and at the same time upholding the honor of our professional status. It may be, however, as well that we were not successful to begin with, for had honors come to us too easily, they might possibly have rendered us careless of our best interests in the future, and the necessity for absolute loyalty and continued personal effort might not have been so early impressed upon our minds with sufficient emphasis. Be that as it may, the events of the past year have made even the doubters among us realize that, in a certain sense, the trained nurse as a unit is nobody; and although at this writing the success or failure of the Army Nursing Bill is still undecided, we may still feel that, whether we win or lose the cause for this year, we should be deeply grateful that we were a sufficiently organized and representative body to be able to unite in working to uphold and guard our professional honor and its welfare.

In other ways, also, there has been a closer drawing together and a broader outlook developed, chiefly through the efforts of our Educational Committee. For the purpose of education in various cities alumnae members of different schools have met together, and, in accordance with the programme submitted by the Educational Committee, courses of lectures and talks on various topics have been arranged and well-attended meetings have been held at the various alumnae club-rooms. Incidentally this exchange of alumnae courtesies has been the means of stirring up a considerable pride and ambition in individual school alum-

næs, and as a result new club-houses have been established. These meetings may also be regarded as the forerunners of the local clubs which we shall hope to see begun in the near future.

But no doubt the chief subject that has largely held our interest during the two years past has been army nursing, and the various phases of the problem have been studied by many of us with keen interest. To-day the need for a better organization of the nursing forces on a modern basis in every country is being as plainly demonstrated in South Africa as it was in the late Spanish-American war, although, happily for the sufferers, not to the same painful extent as happened in the case of our own soldiers. But as was only natural, efforts to bring about a better state of affairs at once developed the opposition which is always encountered by work which is healthy and progressive. Fortunately, the opposition comes from the outside and is purely commercial; it does not represent any high aims or definite principles; its leaders are not trained nurses, and the success of their projects would mean the complete subjection of trained nurses. We have, therefore, no common ground upon which any compromise can be effected. When trained nurses have demonstrated their inability to look after their own affairs, then and not till then can they permit themselves to be guided and governed by women whose ruling motive must be a commercial one, as such women cannot appreciate the work to be done or the proper methods for performing it, as can trained nurses themselves.

The growth of our association is steady and encouraging. This year we add five more large schools to our membership, and six small general schools will be admitted into associate membership as soon as certain changes in the constitution, which will be made at this meeting, have rendered the step legal. At this meeting we shall also be called upon to consider the question of enlarging our borders in order to admit, on the same footing as *alumnæ* associations, local associations, some of whose members have not had the opportunity of being connected with *alumnæ* (in case such associations do not exist in their schools), but who would bring into a local association the same standard as that required by our *alumnæ*s. Each *alumnæ* has received due notice of the amendment to come up at this meeting, so no doubt you are all conversant with the pros and cons of the question. It is desired that this point shall be settled before we proceed to the formation of State associations, which the various *alumnæ*s of New York purpose to take steps to do very shortly in their State. This will not be the first time the question of local and State associations has come before us for discussion. A large portion of our First Annual Report is made up of papers and discussions upon the subjects of State and local associations. I would strongly recom-

mend each member of this association to provide herself with a copy of the First Annual Report and read and consider carefully the points brought out at our first meeting; if this is done, I am sure the need for such associations will be better understood. At that same meeting a committee was appointed to report upon the formation of local associations. Last year no written report was submitted by that committee, but I should like to quote from the verbal report made by its chairman (Miss Nutting):

“Not much has been accomplished this year, but there has been a good deal of thinking done. It seems that the time is coming for the forming of local associations, thus uniting those alumnae associations which are eligible for representation in the national association, and which should include stray graduates of other schools who are in good standing in their own alumnae associations.” It would mean that all the associations and the graduates must be eligible to membership in the national association. I cannot see how local associations could be formed on other lines. But it is evident that that would bar out a great many women who graduated years ago from schools that are not eligible to membership in this association, and yet there is no doubt of the great benefit it would be to these women to work with such local associations. Probably it is those nurses who would be most anxious to attend such meetings and who would derive most benefit from them. I am aware from things that have come to my notice that these should be much more comprehensive than the original idea of the local association. The whole subject is something that has to be considered. No actual work has been done as yet. The question is, how inclusive shall they be? This is just the question which we trust our delegates have come prepared to answer and settle at this meeting. It is not one of my duties to instruct you, but I may at least ask you to remember that our object in associating is to advance the interests of the whole *nursing profession* and not merely those of any one association. After deciding upon the formation of local associations, we trust steps may very soon be taken to formulate State associations, beginning, in all probability, with the State of New York.

As many of us know, the question of registration for trained nurses has been long in our minds, but we were also aware that to advocate legislation for nurses eight or ten years ago would have been to “put the cart before the horse.” At that time, no *esprit de corps* existed among the leaders in our schools. Nothing much in the way of systematizing teaching was recognized; certainly there was no uniformity in curriculum and not even an attempt at a general education and ethical standard. Among the nurses there was no professional feeling, not even

among the graduates of the same school; there was simply nothing organized or professional about us. Collectively we could neither qualify as a profession, a calling, or a trade. For to be a member of a profession implies more responsibility, more serious duties, a higher skill, and work demanding a more thorough education than is required in many other vocations in life. But two things more are needful,—organization and legislation. A calling, in its accepted sense, implies more exclusively a consecrated religious life, such as that of sisterhoods with their religious restrictions, which are more numerous and exacting than those demanded of the trained nurse; while, on the other hand, a trade is more largely concerned with manual labor. We were, therefore, a most indefinite quantity. How, then, could we ask for legislation as a profession when we did not exist as such? We had, therefore, to know and understand ourselves, in some measure, before we could possibly determine our rightful status. Modern medicine, in requiring of us the professional attributes, has taken the decision out of our hands, and has made trained nursing a profession; but how soon we shall attain to the full professional level depends upon ourselves entirely. Before all, then, it was necessary to organize, and the rapidity and thoroughness with which you went at and accomplished the first steps were truly amazing, and not the least delightful part to witness has been the splendid, broad-minded, liberal spirit with which you have met each other. This passing tribute of pride and pleasure in your achievements may be permitted to one who has watched unceasingly every step in your growth and who knows whereof she speaks. These important phases in development, though comparatively rapid, have followed each other in their natural sequence; as a result there has been no time lost in retracing steps, but a gradual broadening out has been going on as need arose. Thus organization has developed through the Society of Superintendents standing for educational advancement, to the school alumnæ, representing home as well as professional interests, to the national association, representing the profession, with its larger life and affairs, and where each alumnæ has equal representation. Furthermore, after this meeting we may hope for the rapid development of local associations, where each nurse, in one State and town to-day and in another far away to-morrow, may still have her recognized place and voice in the affairs of her profession; and finally, before we meet again, we look for the formation of at least one State association, the last link in the chain of organization.

But with the completion of the chain the fulness of time brings us face to face with the vital question of registration for nurses, the foundation for which was laid just seven years ago. State registration is certainly the next and most important step towards achieving a fixed

professional standard. According to the Constitution of the United States, an act authorizing registration for the whole profession and country cannot be passed by Congress at Washington, but each State must make its own laws for its own nurses. New York with its local and State associations will become sufficiently representative to ask for legal recognition for trained nurses within its domains. It is only fitting that this State should take the initiative. Its educational institutions are controlled by the University of the State of New York, which will not allow members of any profession to practise in the State until they show proper proofs that they have graduated from some recognized qualified school, and have also passed certain prescribed examinations in the studies taught in these schools. Only to those who satisfy these requirements is a license granted by the regents of the university. If, then, similar requirements had to be met by trained nurses, nursing would at once be established on a distinct educational plane. Again, as New York is the home of the mother of training-schools in this country, it is but fitting that this State should first receive the crowning glory of the work she so bravely undertook. Nor will the other States lag far behind her in this respect if we may judge by the alacrity with which they followed her lead in establishing schools for nurses. Only by a complete system of registration will it be possible for trained nursing to attain to its full dignity as a recognized profession and obtain permanent reforms. As the matter stands at present, the woman who has spent years of hard work and study in acquiring skill and knowledge as a nurse, on undertaking private nursing finds at once that she is classed on a level with all sorts and grades of so-called trained nurses; nor has she any redress. She is expected to work side by side with the uncertified hospital nurse who has been dismissed for cause before the expiration of her term as a student, with the half-trained nurse from the specialty hospitals, with the nurse who has received the kind of instruction that makes her dangerous, with the adventuress and the amateur,—women masquerading as nurses, a matter of uniforms with no knowledge behind them,—with the second-year hospital pupil sent out during the time that should have been devoted to her education to earn money for the institution. Is it to be wondered at that with such a levelling, with the competent confused with the incompetent in the eyes of the public, that the severe and continual criticism should fall upon the just as well as upon the unjust, and that the nursing profession should suffer for the sins and shortcomings of those who should not be ranked as belonging to it. Our sympathies are divided between a long-suffering and much sinned against public and the genuine trained nurse. Such anomalous conditions have gone far towards bringing private duty into bad odor,

and as a result many of our best graduates prefer to remain in hospitals, at a much less income, because there they hold a definite recognized professional status, since in all hospitals worthy of the name the authorities recognize the necessity and importance of having trained nurses in charge of the nursing department, and the staff is made up either of graduates or pupils, no room or place remaining for nondescripts.

But with registration this unfortunate condition of things will be changed; the professional status of the trained nurse will be defined no less sharply than that of the physician or of the lawyer. By these means also the public would be provided with a distinguishing mark whereby they could know whether any given nurse has been properly trained, and is a suitable person to take charge of the sick; whereas in the absence of a public registry or of a physician to make the selection they are left without any guarantee of the efficiency of the various candidates. Again, since the medical profession must always wish to secure for their patients the best care, it will undoubtedly heartily endorse this further effort to increase and improve the efficiency of the nursing service. Lastly, as regards training-schools themselves, the introduction of a legalized registration would naturally stimulate both schools and graduates to reach the required educational standard. Each school would be obliged to give the pupils such thorough instruction in the theory and practice of nursing as would enable them to pass the examination prescribed by law and obtain the certificate which would authorize them to practise as trained nurses. These examinations could be conducted by properly qualified boards, the members of which would be largely drawn from those among the ranks of the trained nurses who have had special experience in such matters; who know what good nursing is, how it should be taught, and what standard is desirable and at the same time attainable.

Of course such a law would not be retroactive and would not affect graduate nurses, who were already in the field, beyond requiring them to present their diplomas and apply for registration.

With this final step in our professional organization accomplished, we are ready to set to work to some purpose to define our ethical code, which belongs to the other side of nursing—the corrective of a too pronounced professional attitude, and which in its fulfilment rounds off our work.

Although we are nearing the completion of the last links of our national organization there are still others to be forged, by which we hope to unite ourselves in professional bonds with those of our own guild in other countries and become identified with woman's work at large all over the world, thus gaining additional breadth and strength for

our own more specialized efforts. Last year, you may remember, we were proffered the privilege of membership in the International Council of Women; this year we have a similar invitation from the International Council of Nurses, which is one of the outcomes of last year's meeting, and which in itself goes to show that American nurses are by no means alone in feeling the need for organization. Indeed, the work that nurses are achieving along these lines in other countries makes interesting and inspiring reading and brings home to each one of us convincingly the importance of personal loyalty, personal interest, and personal work, without which we can never hope to attain the full measure of success. At our first annual meeting Miss Dolliver put the case exactly when she said, "So long as there is one graduate who is not with us we are weak by so much as her mind, character, and influence are valued at." If we do not take care of our own affairs, rest assured that outsiders will undertake the task for us to our everlasting undoing and to the detriment of the public, whose sick we have the privilege of ministering to.

Whether we shall take up or lay aside our professional responsibilities is not a matter of choice, but a question of duty and conscience. Do you think it right that any one of us, who have come to a clear understanding of the seriousness and importance of nursing work, should go her separate way and take her own ease and pleasure while there is even one human life imperilled for the want of good nursing? Can we be still and let things just take their own way so long as the stamp of mediocrity marks a work to which should be given the best and highest that the hands, hearts, and minds of women can bring to it? This is no work that can be taken up lightly or laid aside carelessly by the first-comer, but one that should be intrusted only to women, each one of whom should be ordained a priestess, as it were, before she presumes to enter into the temple to perform her ministries unto sick and suffering humanity.

OUR FLOATING HOSPITALS

BY CHARLOTTE MANDEVILLE PERRY

THIS great charity has been in existence a quarter of a century. It originated in the attempt to rescue sick children from unwholesome, often fatal, surroundings, where during the summer months child-disease runs rampant, and to place them under conditions favorable to recovery.

The attempt first expressed itself in excursion trips, sea-shore homes, and summer outings by the salt water,—the sea-breezes possessing a wonderfully restorative as well as tonic effect. But this only afforded